



**“Every-day Life of Railroad Men,” from *The American Railway*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1889.**

One of the habitués of every station master is the section-master, [422]  
who looks after three, five, or ten miles of track and a gang of from five  
to twenty-five men who keep it in repair. He is not much seen, because he [423]  
is out on the road most of the time; and his duties are not of a kind that  
the reader could study, on paper, to much advantage; but he deserves  
mention because his place is a really important one. Railroad tracks can-  
not be made, like a bridge, five times as strong as is necessary, and thus  
a large margin be allowed for deterioration; they must be constantly  
watched to see that they do not fall even a little below their highest stan-  
dard. This care-taking can be intrusted only to one who has had long ex-  
perience at the work. In violent rain-storms the trackman must be on duty  
night and day and patrol the whole length of his division to see that gravel  
is not washed over the track or out from under it. Though roughly dressed  
and sunburnt, he is an important personage in the eye of the engineer of  
a fast express train, and if he be the least but negligent, even to the extent  
of letting a few rails get a quarter of an inch lower than they ought to, he  
hears a prompt appeal from the engine-runner. The latter could not feel  
the confidence necessary to guide his 50-ton giant over the road at lighten-  
ing speed with its precious human freight if he had not a trustworthy track-  
man every few miles; and passengers who feel like expressing gratitude  
for a safe railroad journey should never forget this unseen guardian.